Rick Payne's

MENU

Chicken Skin Slide



Play Slide Guitar

RY COODER STYLE

VIDEO
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INTRODUCTION

Ry Cooder is a maestro of slide guitar. Think slide, think Ry Cooder. From early beginnings with legendary players like Taj Mahal, Captain Beefheart and The Rolling Stones he has made his mark as the man to bring authentic slide to the fore.

He has forged a successful career as a front man to a wide range of music from roots, rock, Tex-Mex, country, gospel, world music. Just about any style, Ry has been there.

An innovative slide player, he broke the mould of typical 'blues-boom' slide and created a style which is completely his own, though still managing to maintain hints of all the great slide players like Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, Blind Willie Johnson, Tampa Red**,** and many more.
With this unique style, his slide playing has become the highlight of his shows and movie sound tracks and can only be described as 'Chicken Skin' - your hairs literally stand on end when you hear him. Listen to the opening moments of the movie, 'Paris Texas' and you'll know what I mean.

I've been a huge fan of Ry Cooder throughout his career, and have used much of his style in my own playing - listen to him and you can hear, and therefore learn, from all the greats.

In this course, you'll be playing some of the great Cooder styles and can choose whether you use acoustic or electric guitar to get that 'Chicken Skin' sound. If you're new to slide, you can develop your technique with a host of Cooder warm up's then try the study pieces that will get you sounding like the man himself.

So, if you're ready to shake down that bottle neck, let's

Chicken Skin Slide

Stay connected to the web and visit all the highlighted links for more info and insight into Ry Cooder.



USING THE MANUAL

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SOFTWARE INSTALLATION

To view this manual correctly you need to have installed the latest version of Adobe Acrobat if you can't view the videos, or hear the MP3's then install the PDF reader **here.**

Videos are formatted as Quicktime movies so you should have a player installed. If not, download free player **here.**

It is essential to have the Powertab program installed in order to use the interactive Powertab pages. These will enable you to play, slowdown, loop and make your own changes to the tab and help speed up your learning. If you haven't already installed please do so **here.**
Mac users can view Powertab files by downloading reader **here.**

Powertab overview

THE MANUAL

This study program is very effective if you follow the recomendations below:

1. Make full use of the videos, MP3's and powertab. Adobe pdf will ask you if you wish to open these files - please say yes!
2. Adapt the exercises to suit your own style - make changes.
3. Check out the Cooder warm ups. Listen and watch the Cooder study tunes. Check out the bar by bar breakdowns.
4. Visit the Cooder **web links** for more information and inspiration.
   Familiarise yourself with the icons below which will enable you to view the multimedia content:

AUDIO PTAB VIDEO

Examples here are from the study piece **'Cooder Rocks'**

MENU

Check out all the extra help using the video tips icon: **Video tip**

NOTES ON COODER

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Biography

Ry Cooder born 15 March 1947, in Los Angeles, California. Career spans from the early 60's till the present day, releasing fourteen solo albums, notably **'Into The Purple Valley'** and **'Bop Till You Drop'**.Six collaborations notably the hugely successful **'Buena Vista Social Club'**. Fourteen movie sound tracks, notably the ground breaking, **'Paris Texas' and 'Crossroads'**. ***View all***

Although most famous for his slide playing, he is a master of many stringed instruments including the banjo, mandolin and bajo sextet. As a session player he has played on numerous artists albums. To mention just a few: **The Rolling Stones, John Lee Hooker, Aaron Neville, Mavis Staples, John Hiatt, Randy Newman, Van Morrison, T Bone Burnett, Nick Lowe, Eric Clapton, Arlo Guthrie.**
View all

Influenced By

Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, Gabby Pahinui, Fred McDowell, Tampa Red, Blind Blake, Bonnie Raitt, Lowell George, Elmore James, Rev Gary Davies, Blind Willie Johnson, David Lindley, Son House, Joseph Spence, Duane Alman, Kokomo Arnold, Casey Bill Weldon, Bukka White, Furry Lewis, Sleepy John Estes
............and more.

Guitars

Cooder has used a wide variety of guitars for slide between the 70's and present day. These include an eclectic mix of acoustic and electric models. Acoustics range from vintage **Martin D35's** and **000-18's, Gibson SJ-200, Gibson Roy Smeck, Kay** and junk shop oddities. Electrics include modified early 60's Strats, using either **Guyatone, Teisco** and lap steel pickups. Ry's main guitar it seems features this combination of Teisco front pick up and **Oahu lap steel pick up** in the bridge position. In the mid eighties he frequently toured with an early **Supro Dualtone**.

Amps

A whole range of vintage Fender, Gibson and Supro - tremelo built in. Although the guitars and pick ups he uses such as the Oahu lap steel, produce a naturally long sustain, he uses a wide range of compression modules in his chain of effects. The early days saw the use of the plug in, **Dan Armstrong's, 'Purple Pecker' or 'Orange Squeeze'**.

Slides

Only uses real cut off bottle necks - said to favour thick glass especially from a 'Fighting Cock' Kentucky Bourbon bottle. Worn on pinky.

Tunings

Ry favours open **D** and **G** tunings or the slack- key varieties of these.
Read more

Technique

Ry uses a mix of fingerstyle (No picks or plectrums) for acoustic and electric slide. A skillful banjo player he is adept at sometimes complex, syncopated fingerstyle patterns around the slide work. Even the single note slide solos are often interspersed with thumb play on the bass strings.
View more in this course

GENERAL TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

What to use for a Slide?

There have been many objects used to achieve the slide sound. Knives, bottle necks, tubes of all kinds of metals and glass, spark plug sockets, lighters, stone, marble, plastic ... anything! At sometime or other I've used them all but to keep things simple and effective, I use a real bottle neck or metal tube, cut long enough to be slightly longer than the pinkie.

Glass or metal?

Glass is great for smooth, long sustain - Paris Texas type stuff. The heavier glass the better. Avoid manufactured glass slides as they tend to lack sustain and brightness - use real bottle glass. Ry Cooder is said to use a **Fighting Cock Kentucky Bourbon** bottle!

Metal is good for more attack, especially electric. Experiment with heavy or light metal - both produce different sounds. Think **Muddy Waters, light. Lowell George(Little Feat) heavy.**

For both glass and metal, think:

- **Heavy** - better for sustain, more accuracy, good for long slow notes
- **Light** - Thin sound, but faster, harder to keep accurate, less volume and sustain

Which Finger?

This is a personal choice as with most aspects of slide playing. Many well known players have used different combinations. I've always found the slide best suited to the pinkie.This allows me more opportunity to finger chords, and play regular fretted notes as well as play the slide. Anyway, if it's good enough for Robert Johnson or Ry Cooder it's good enough for me.

Video tip

How to stop all that scratching and buzzing?

Sometimes the extraneous noises can be used to great effect - listen to **Blind Willie Johnson**. For the purpose of improving technique, try and play cleanly and smoothly. When you release the fingers behind the slide !

- **Action**

  Use a guitar set up with slightly higher action, so there is less chance of the slide banging against the frets. It helps to minimise those extraneous noises we talked about earlier. However, if the action is too high, it will be harder to finger the chords when needed.

- **Strings**

  A personal choice again, but I believe the best sound is achieved by using the thickest you can manage - at least a **.012** on the top. **Bob Brozman** once told me that he used a .0017 on his National - now, there's a real slide man for you!

What about guitars?

Acoustic or electric, who cares. I like the rootsy flavour of an acoustic for instant feel. My favorites are small bodied acoustics and resonators. I love all those junk shop guitars with bowed necks and impossible action. Check them out. Slide players can pick up some real winners. Ry uses old Kay acoustics on many of his recordings.

For electric players, the fenders have great natural sustain. Check out that early Ry Cooder sound. With added compression, like the old **'purple pecker'**, or rack effects, the slide sounds great. On his later albums, Ry used the pick up from an old lap steel, for that real slide sound and sustain. The trick is don't be afraid to experiment.

Vibrato

This is a crucial aspect of slide playing. There are two main reasons for this:

1. Think of the slide (bottleneck, or whatever you decide to use) as a moving fret which by careful handling will maintain the pitch of the note you are trying to play. If you are new to slide playing you will fast realize how difficult this is. Vibrato with the slide means you play a compromise between an in and out of tune note - somewhere in the middle is the correct pitch. Ry uses a fan like movement with the bottle neck for vibrato, especially on the bass strings as thickness needs a wider approach. ***Check out vibrato demo here***

MENU

A violinist uses the same effect on the fretboard (fretless of course) to maintain steady pitch. Witness the intense movement of the fingers as they ensure the right notes are achieved. This is especially so for the slide, when reaching the end of a phrase or riff, as the final note sounds dull or sharp or flat unless vibrato is used

There are many different styles of vibrato. Listen to the intense movement of the slide on **Blind Willie Johnson's - "Dark Was The Night"**, or the almost non existent vibrato on **Tampa Red's "Denver Blues"**. This leads me to my next main point.

2. Vibrato gives your slide playing a personal touch which can reflect the intensity of your mood or your feeling for the blues. Once you feel comfortable with the slide, experiment with different amounts of vibrato - light or heavy. Listen to as many players as you can and gauge the amount used which distinguishes their playing. The slide can be held tight against a finger to produce a very controlled movement or loose for a more carefree result.

Careful though, as they tend to fly off your finger!

Microtones

These are the notes that exist in between the frets and are easily played with the slide. They create an erie sound and add to the dark quality of tunes like Blind Willie Johnson's, **'Dark Was The Night Cold was The Ground'** and of course, **'Paris Texas'** by Ry Cooder. Try moving the slide away from the normal 'over the fret position' and into the box and you'll begin to hear these mysterious tones.

Video tip

Tunings

For slide playing, open tunings will always produce the best authentic sound. If you're looking to emulate Cooder, then it's essential.

The main tunings to work through are:

Open G - D G D G B D
Open D - D A D F# A D
Open E - E B E G# B E

D Wahine D A D F# B D
As used in Gabby's tune

View more on tunings here

G tuning, also known as **'Spanish'** was the norm among the **Delta Blues** players like **Son House** and **Robert Johnson**. Mainly a chordal tuning it gives a bright top end sound and is easy to pick out small chords with top three strings and easy to slide around.

D tuning**,** gives a darker flavour with it's low end and is great for Cooder style slide playing. The octave string is nicely situated on the top or low string and makes melodies easy to create. Once again, think of Blind Willie Johnson or Cooder on Paris Texas.

E tuning is simply a tone higher than D and gives the same effects as the latter, if perhaps a little less dark.

G and **D** are the two favourites of Ry, but take note of the following.

Slack-Key

Although Ry uses these two main tunings it is fair to say if you listen to him the key centre of these tunings change quite a lot.

Slack-key is a way of describing the subtle changes in tunings. This takes D tuning a whole tone or half tone lower, the same technique can be applied to G tuning.

Normal -   D A D F# A D
Slack key - Db Ab Db F Ab D - half tone lower
             C   G   C   E G   C - whole tone lower

If you're aiming for these slack-key tones then it is better to use a lower gauge top string - at least 012 -013.

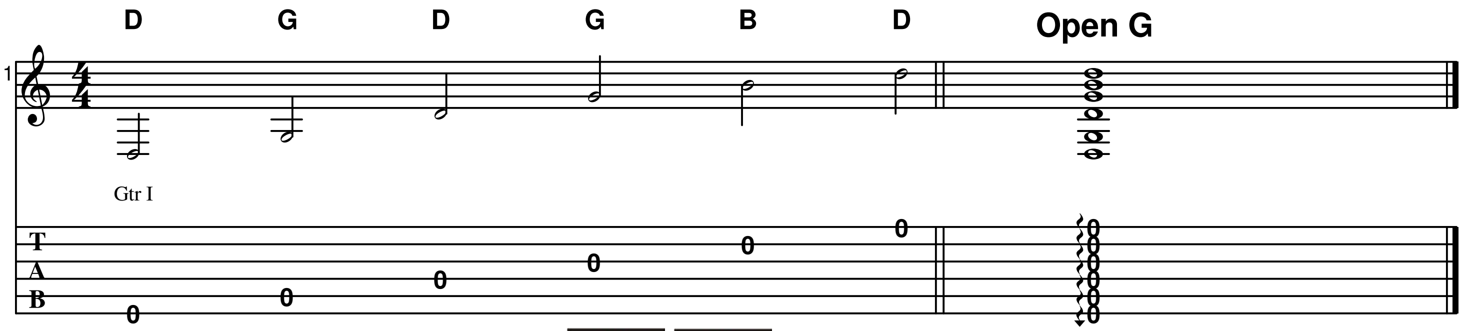
COODER WARM UPS

Ry Cooder's technique is flawless. His pitch, sustain and vibrato has come from years of being master of slide guitar. From my own experience as a slide player it can take a long time to feel really comfortable with a bottle-neck on your finger, especially combining slide playing with fingerstyle, as Ry demonstrates with such ease.

If you're new to slide or want to brush up your technique, then the following warm ups are ideal - especially written to get you in the right style set for the Cooder tunes later in the course.

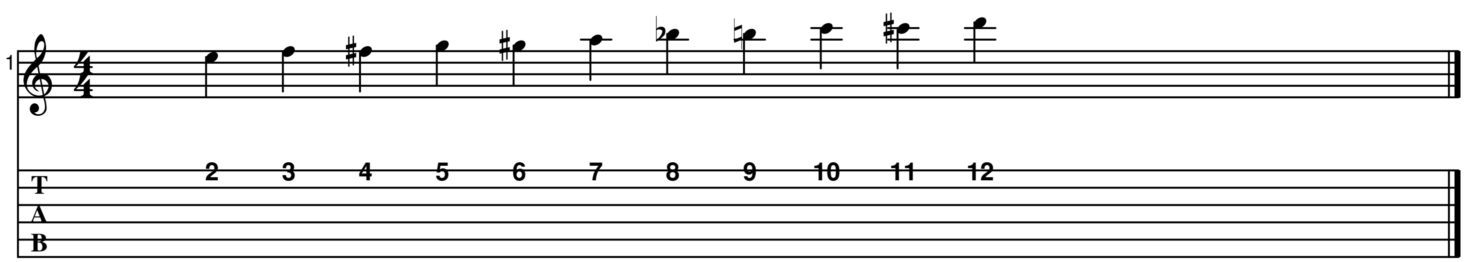
Cooder uses exclusively open tunings for slide and exercises 1 - 14 are in open G tuning.

If you're not already familiar with this tuning here it is:



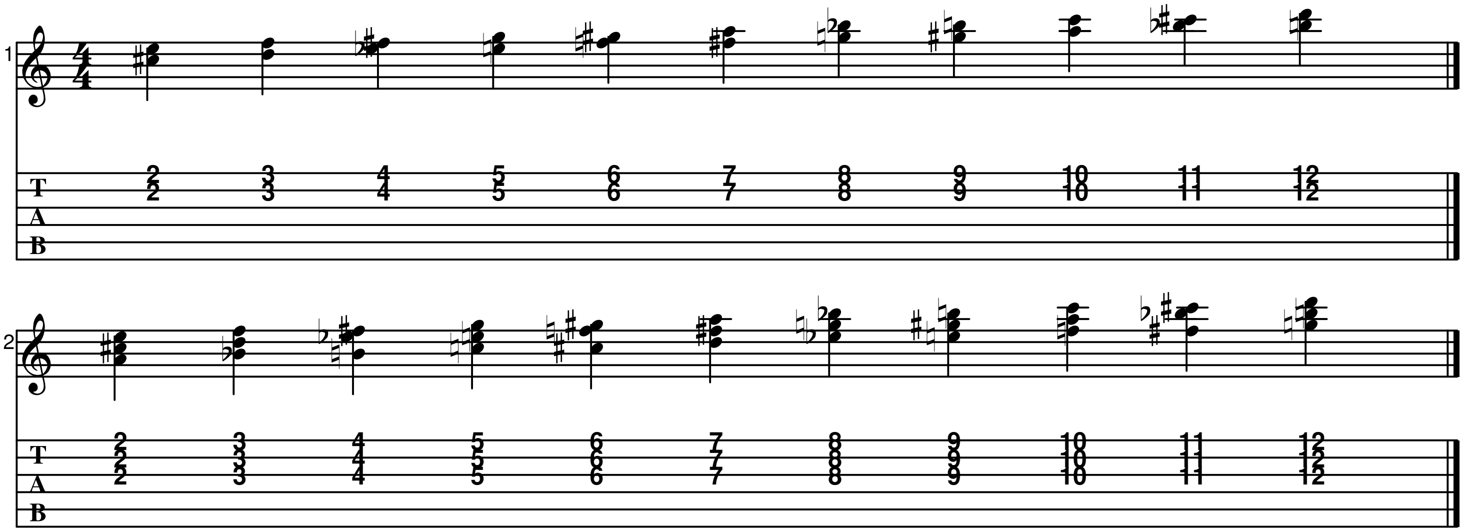
EX.1

Using just the top string, try this exercise to control your pitch. Play each note with the slide with no vibrato and aim and aim for as near to pitch as possibe.



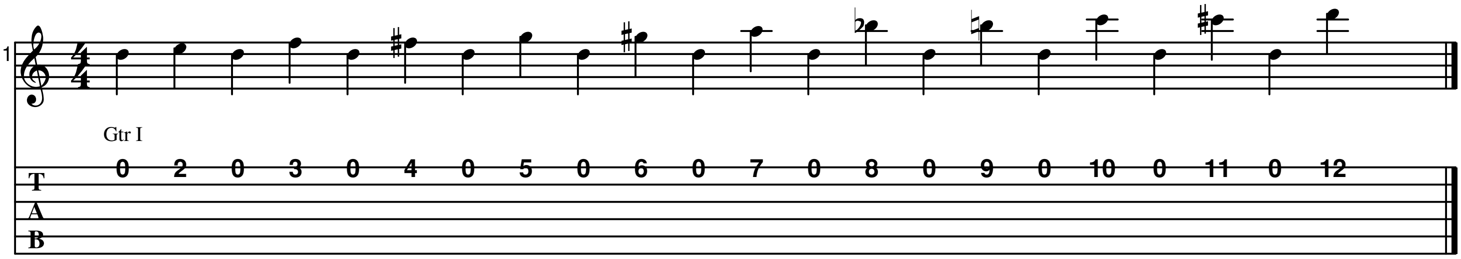
EX.2

Using the same technique of finding pitch with no vibrato, try using double and triple string groups:



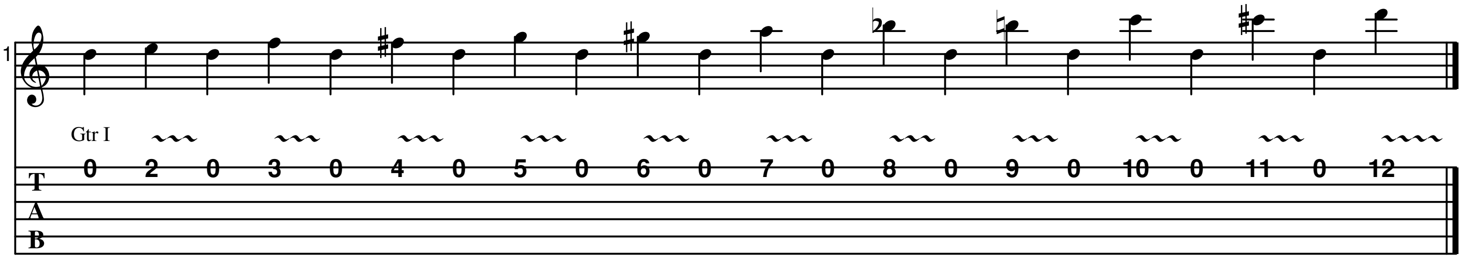
EX.3

Now preceed each note with an open string:



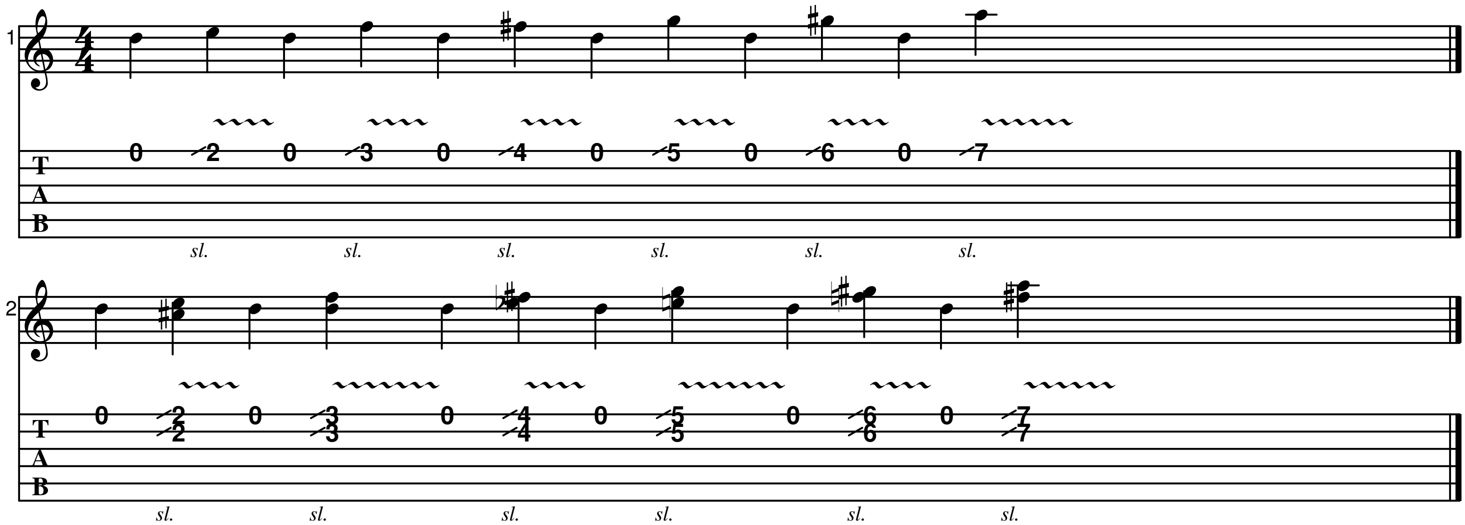
EX.4

Begin to introduce vibrato to control pitch - use your fingers behind the slide to help reduce noise and buzzing. You can also try with without dampening behind the slide if you want to recreate the rural flavour of say, 'Blind Willie Johnson'



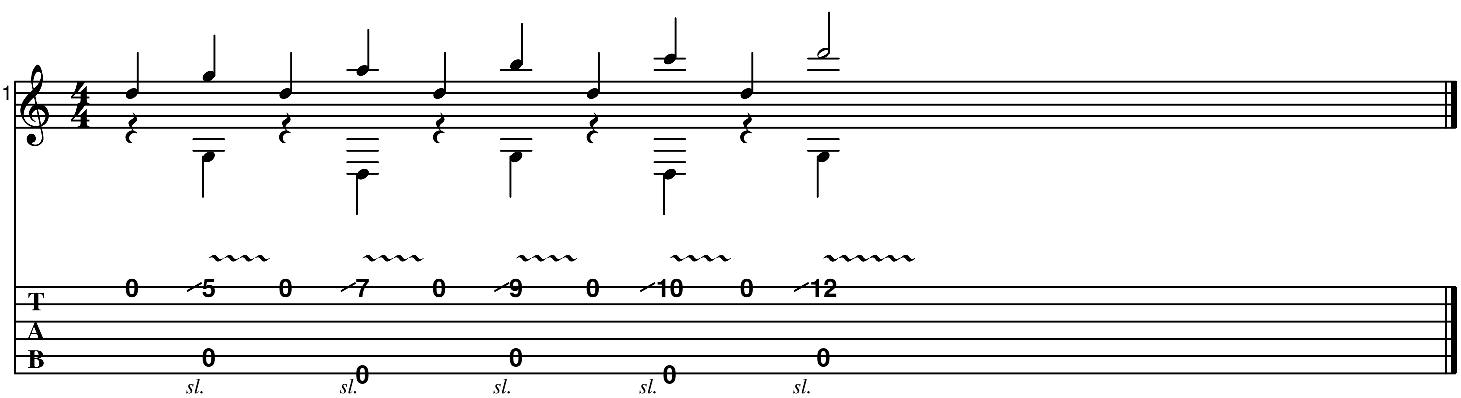
EX.5

Using the same notes as in the previous exercise, this time slide into each of the notes and finish with vibrato:



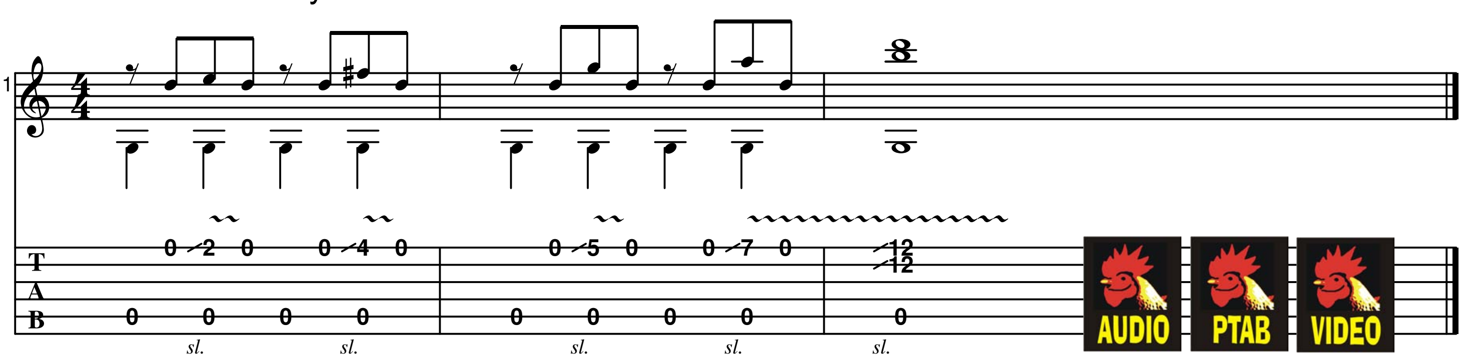
EX.6

Because finger style is prominent in Cooder's style, you can begin to introduce a few bass notes with your thumb, to accompany these exercises. Try the following:



EX.7

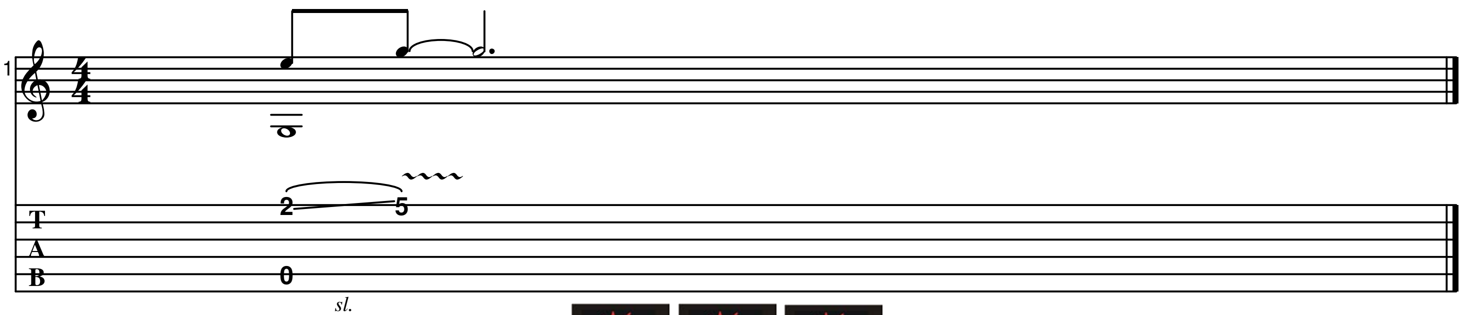
And with more rhythm:



EX.8

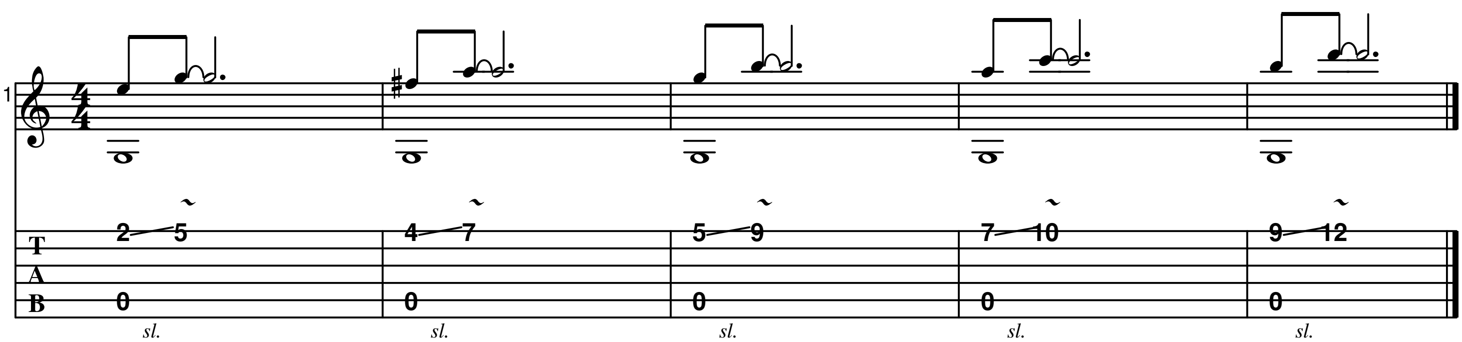
Now, you can try these sliding scale exercises - very important to the Cooder style as he is excellent at sweeping with accuracy over wide ranges of the fret board.

In this exercise, hold the slide over the 2nd fret, strike the note then slide smoothly to the 5th fret. When you reach this note finish off with vibrato to hold the pitch and sustain. Experiment with different kinds of vibrato for expression:



EX.9

Try using wider intervals between the notes:

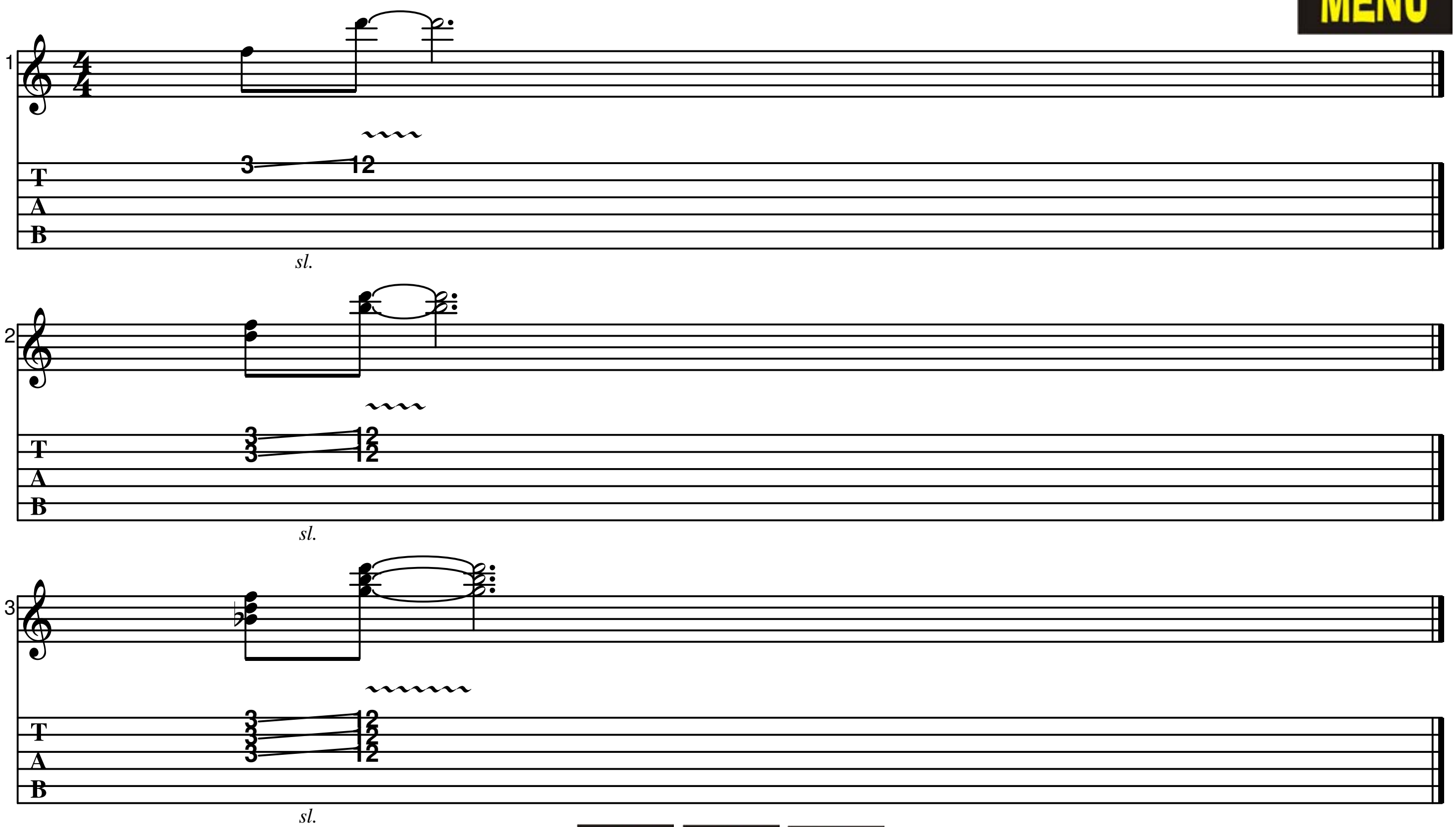


EX.10

The long sweep. Start at the 3rd fret, strike the string and sweep up to the 12th fret, ending once again with vibrato.

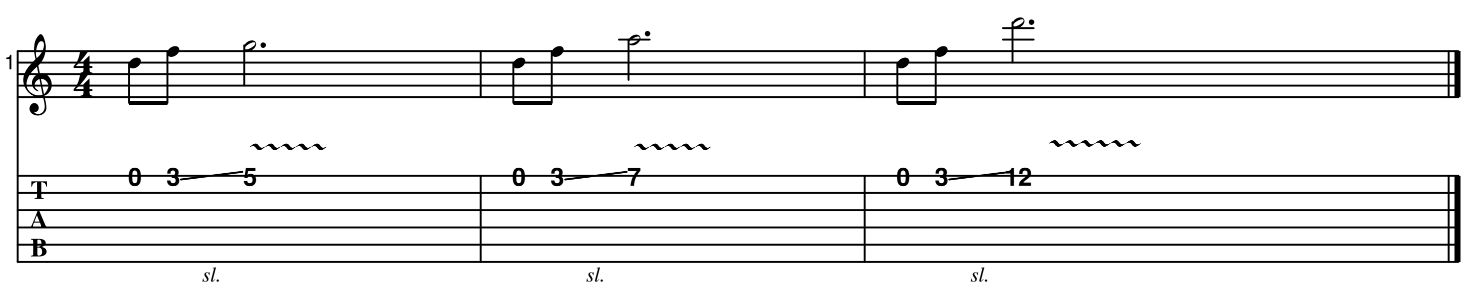
Try the following exercises with both single, double and triple notes:

Cont



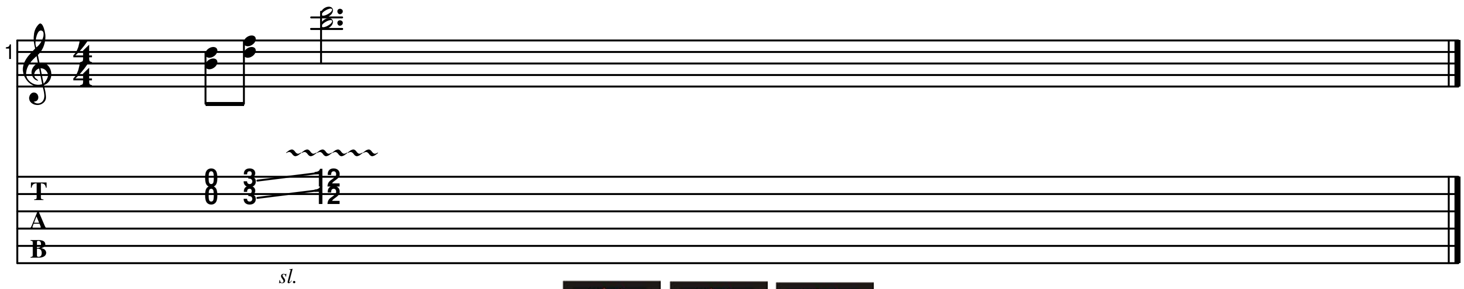
EX.11

Using an open string and 3rd fret as a starting point, experiment sweeping to different positions on the fret board:



EX.12

As with the previous exercises, use the same technique with both double and triple strings - with dampening behind the slide or without, as you feel:



AUDIO PTAB VIDEO

EX.13

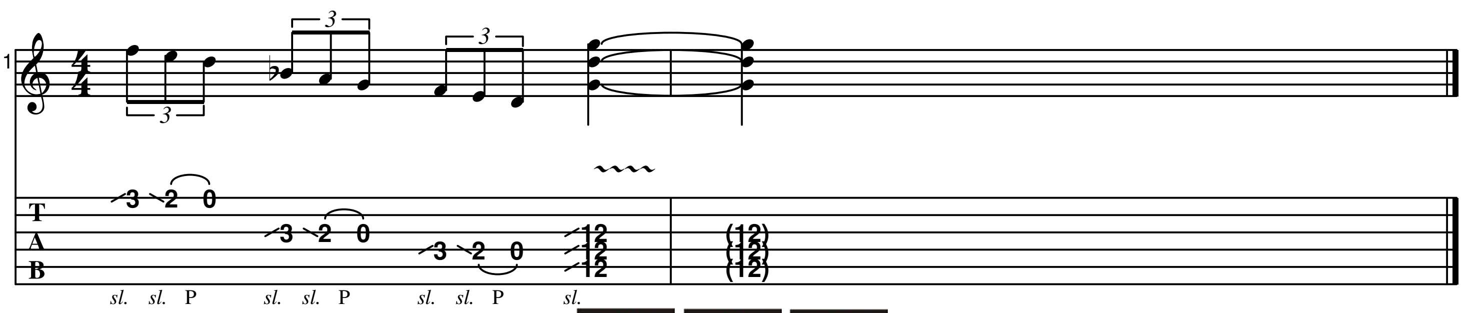
Playing off open strings is very Cooder, and of course, had it's roots in the Delta style. Use the slide to pull off to the open strings before you slide up to the 5th fret:



AUDIO PTAB VIDEO

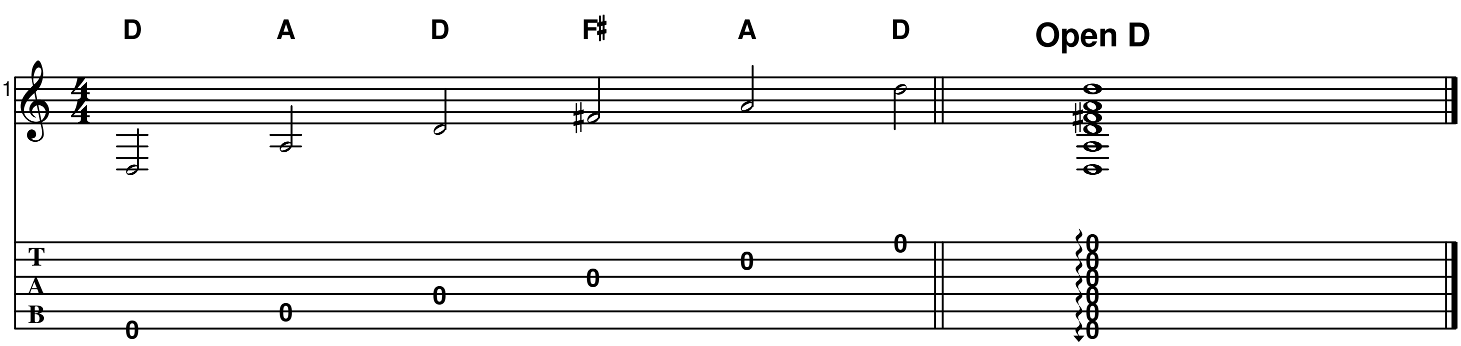
EX.14

Begin to introduce more rhythm into these exercises, like so:



Fingerstyle and slide are very much entwined in Cooder's style. It's important to try the next few exercises if you really want to get the Cooder flavour into your playing.

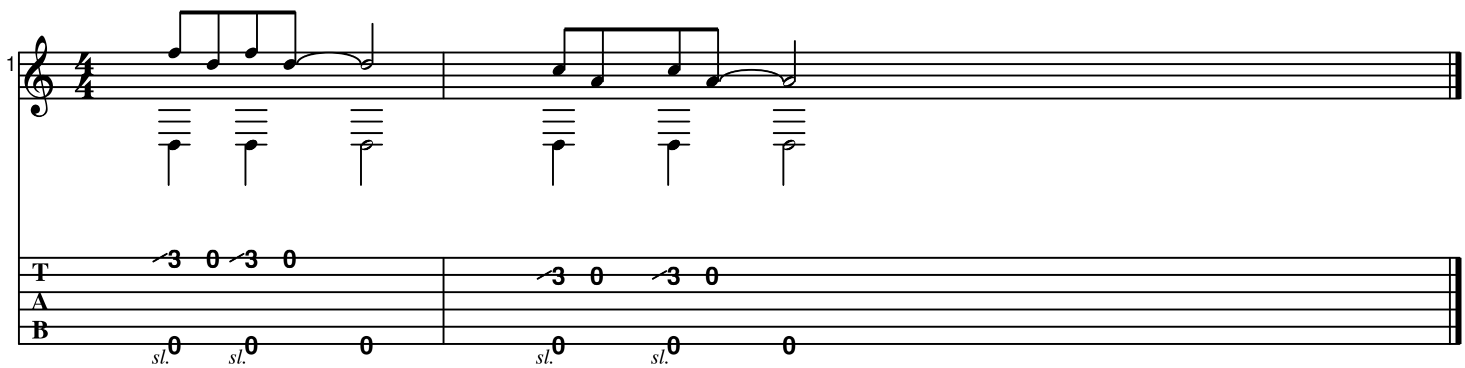
I've written these in D tuning, as I think they best demonstrate this style. So, let's first review this tuning:



For even more Cooder flavour, try tuning down to **slack-key**, either **Db** or **C.**
Review these tunings in the **'General Tips On Slide section'** of this course.

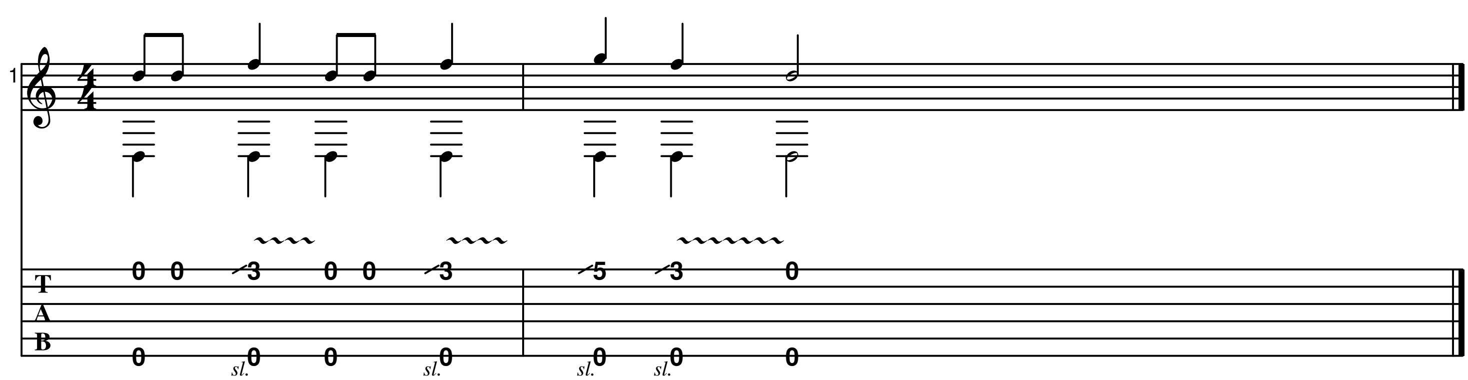
EX.15

Here's a simple slide exercise for both thumb and fingers:



EX.16

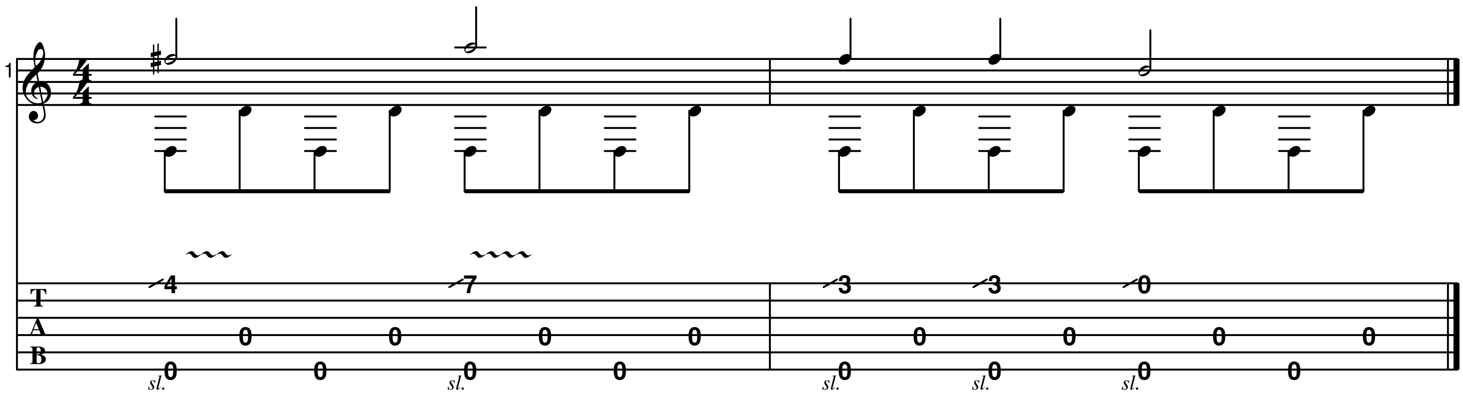
And, a little more of the same idea:



MENU

EX.17

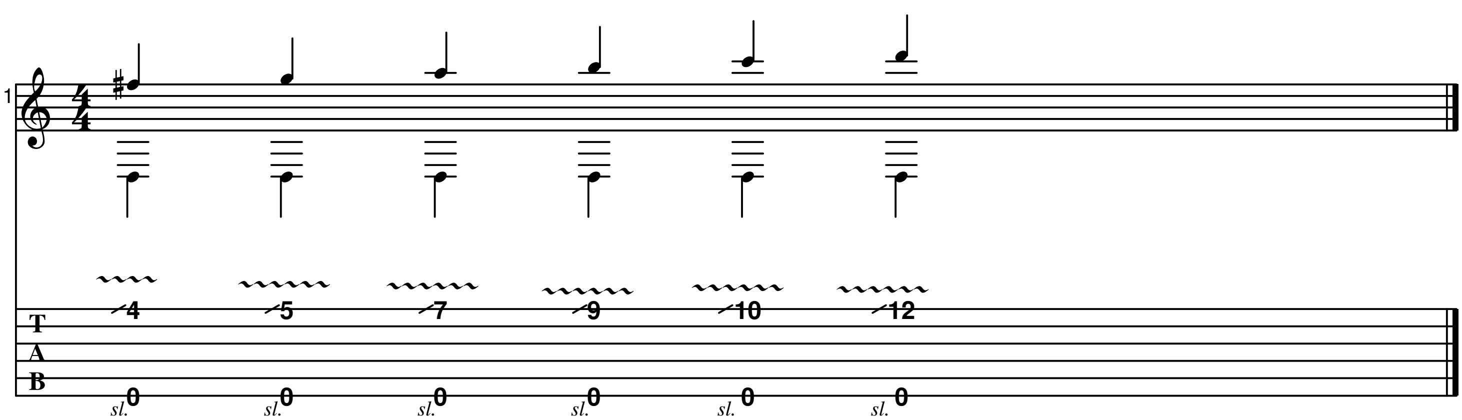
Cooder is very adept at playing melodies on the 6th string while maintaining an accompaniment on the bass strings. This style evokes the early sounds of slide guitar wizzard **'Tampa Red':**



AUDIO PTAB VIDEO

EX.18

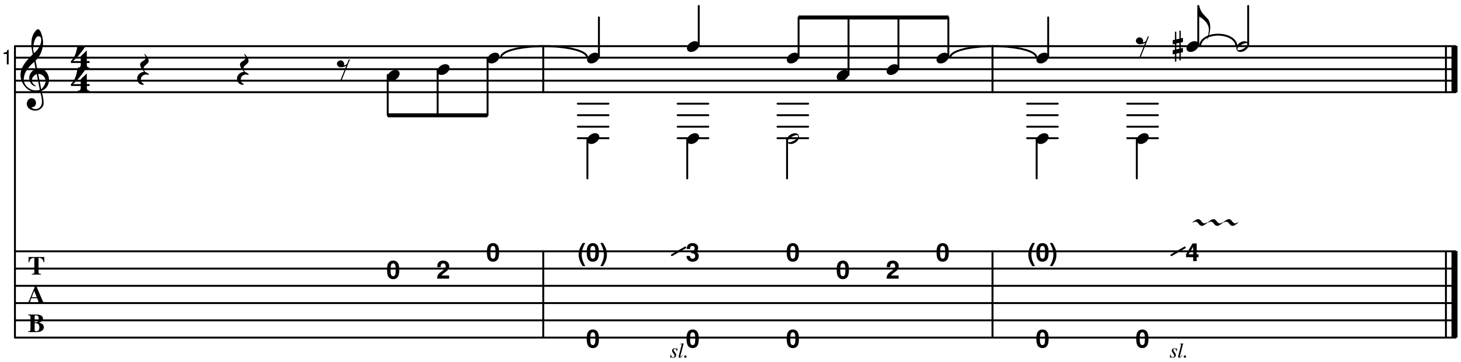
You can change fret positions for creating more variation in melody:



AUDIO PTAB VIDEO

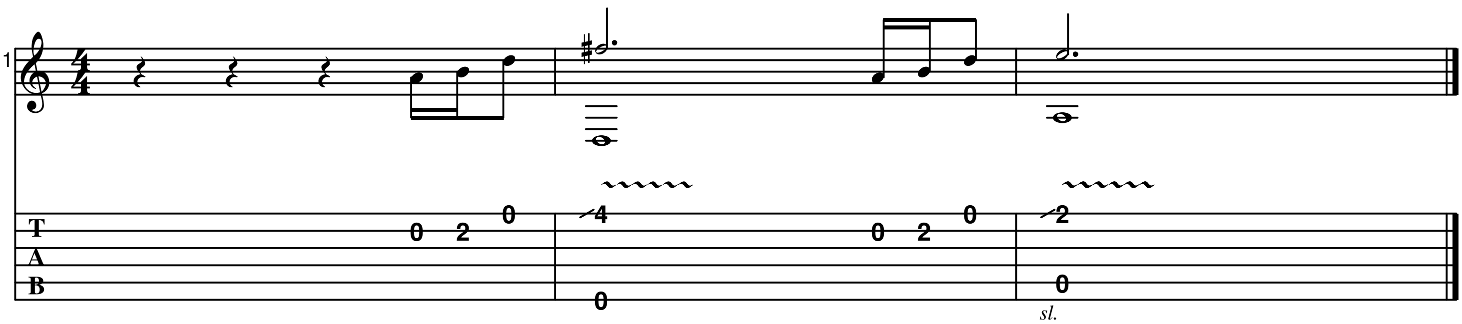
EX.19

For more of this Cooder technique, check out 'Mainline' from the study tunes section, or warm up your fingerstyle and slide with the following exercise:



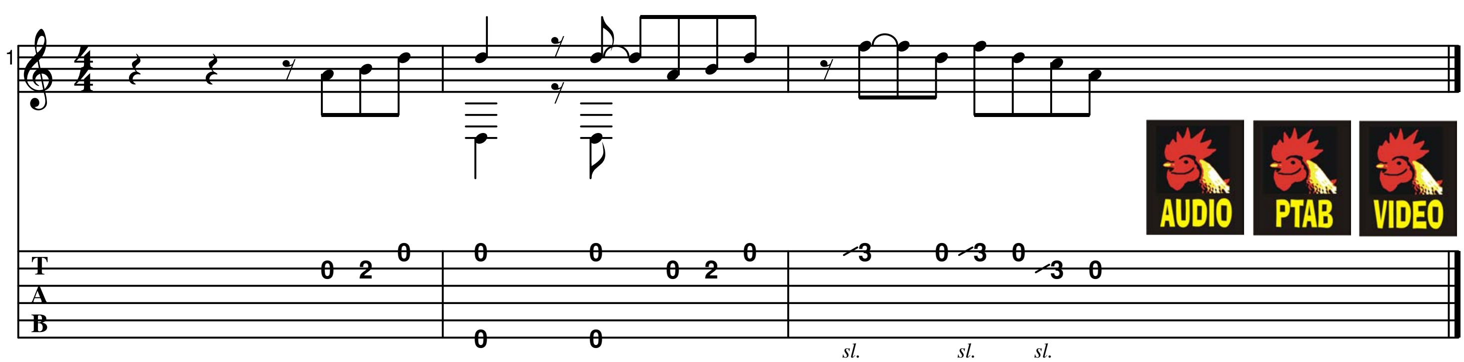
EX.20

Here's another example of the way Ry uses fingerstyle, sounds great on either acoustic or electric:



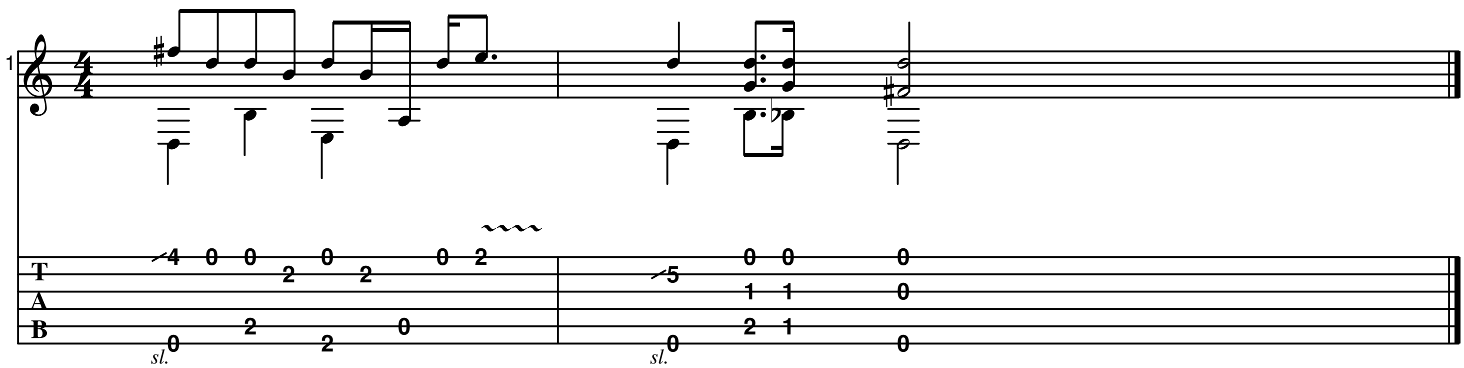
EX.21

Ry uses plenty of syncopated picking with slide guitar. Check this out:

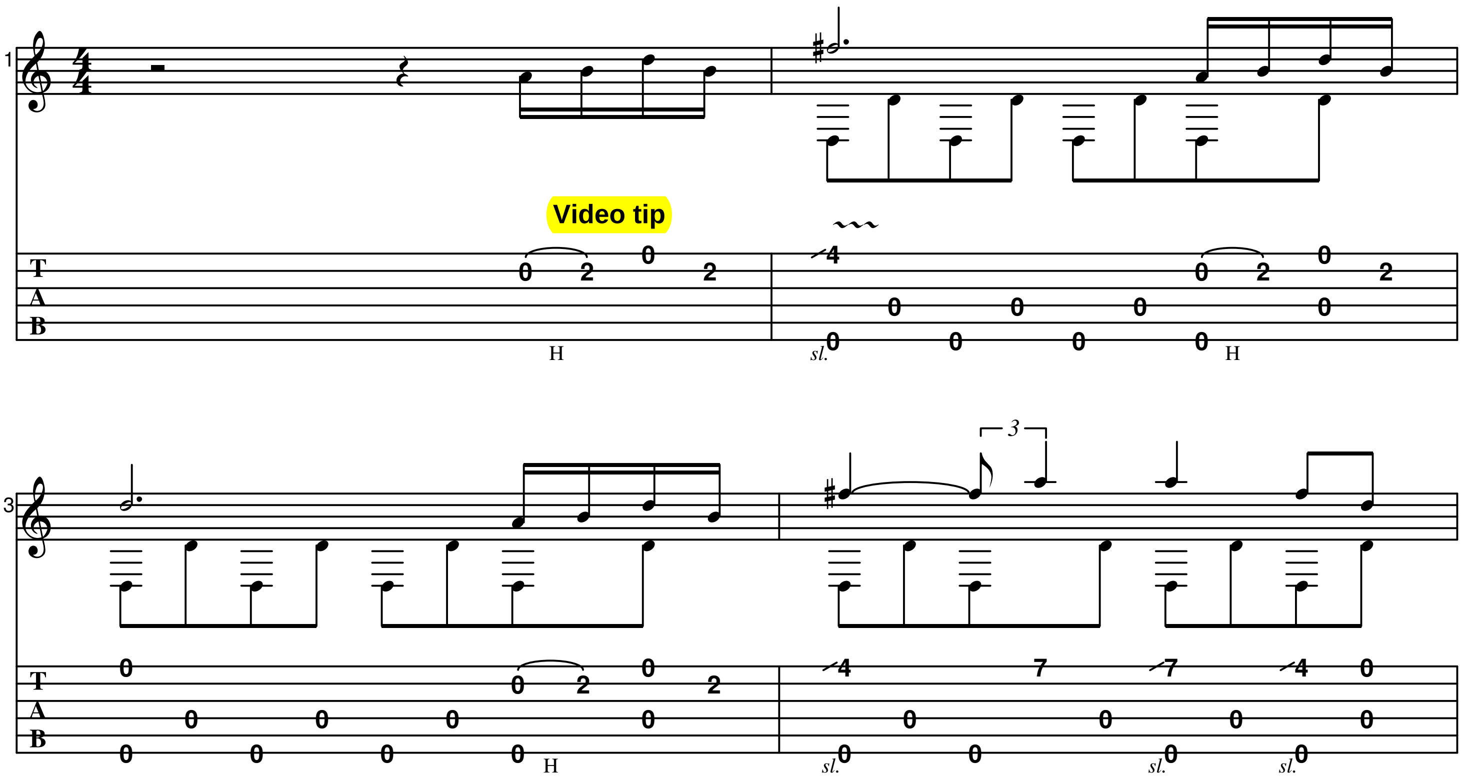


EX.22

Here's a classic Cooder riff and a great exercise too:



As a final warm up before you try the Cooder study tunes, this exercise uses some of the ideas you've just worked on. It's a longer workout but essential for both slide, thumb and fingers.



Cont



Study Tunes



Play Slide Guitar

RY COODER STYLE

BOOMER'S BLUES

G Tuning



Boomer's Blues is written in **G tuning** and is reminiscent of the early Cooder slide on the albums **'Ry Cooder'**, **'Boomer's Story'**, and **'Into The Purple Valley'**. It sounds great on either acoustic or electric slide. On the audio and video I'm using a small bodied acoustic for an authentic 'rootsy' sound. It's fairly easy to play and is based around a blues progression, with the main theme working around the 12th, 5th and 7th positions. Aim for pitch and expression, taking note of the vibrato markings.
The intro is an early Cooder motif and is finger-picked with no slide.

VIGILANTE

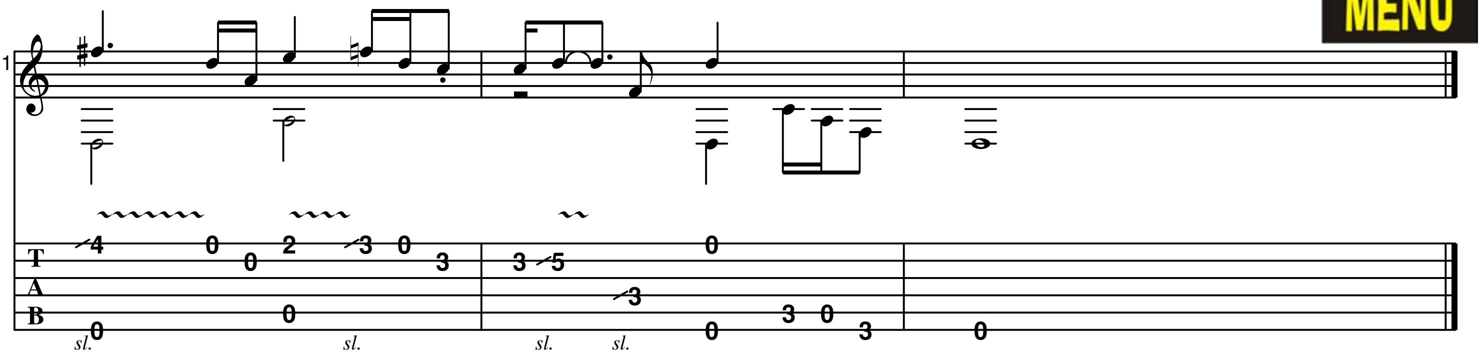
AUDIO PTAB VIDEO

MENU

D Tuning

♩ = 60 Video tip





I've based this Cooder style classic on his haunting version of **'Vigilante Man'** first featured on his album **'Into The Purple Valley'**. Using D tuning, it has instant Cooder flavour and is a must on acoustic guitar. A full bodied **Martin D35** would be ideal. I'm using a vintage Martin style **Takamine** for a similar effect.

Vigilante is a blend of slide melody, played mostly on the top string **(D)** with fingerstyle support around the bass strings. Once again, as it is a fairly slow piece, aim for an emotive vibrato to maintain pitch and sustain.

COLD GROUND

D Tuning

♩ = 60





I've mentioned **'Blind Willie Johnson'** several times in this course for the simple reason his style features so much in Ry Cooder's slide playing. This tune is a take on the classic **'Dark Was The Night Cold Was The Ground'** which, in a similar version, was reinvented for the film sound track **'Paris Texas'**

Once again D tuning allows for an atmospheric melody to be played on the top strings with added bass line support on the low strings. The three and two note chords provide the ominous intro, and could be played with muting behind the slide or without. Plenty of vibrato with these chords sounds great.

A small bodied acoustic gives an authentic Cooder sound for this style and is also close to the original 'Blind Willie Johnson' flavour.

DARK STREETS

AUDIO PTAB VIDEO

MENU

G Tuning

♩ = 55






10
14
Ad Lib
18
sl.

'Dark Streets', in **G tuning**, shows you one of the many ways Ry Cooder approached his slide lead to the wonderful **'Dark End Of The Street'**. This tune originally appeared on the album **'Boomers Story'** as an instrumental, but later concert performances saw it become a vocal number with the spot light on Ry's soloing. He plays a never ending variety of lead lines over the chord changes, sweeping the fretboard with quality tone, sustain and vibrato.

Electric guitar fits this style best, though the slide works just as well with acoustic. I've seen him use a variety of electrics, ranging from **customised Strats to Supro** guitars. I'm using a modified **Fender Music Master** with a **Supro** lap steel pick up in the bridge position. These pick ups produce a long sustain without the need to add lots of compression, so are ideally suited for a tune like 'Dark Streets'.

This is a great exercise in holding pitch with the slide.You don't want loads extraneous noises, so mute behind the bottle neck and keep the note pure. There's no finger style in this tune it's simply slide all the way so unless open strings, play each note with the slide.

The backing is played in open G tuning too using descending style arpeggios in the progression **G D/F# Em.**

Play audio backing

MAIN LINE

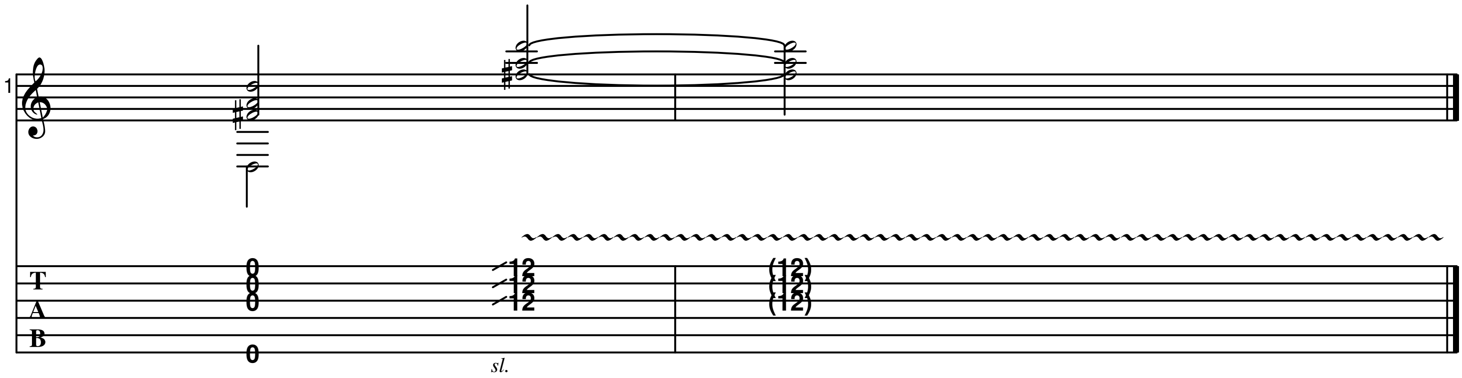
D Tuning

♩ = 80




Video tip





'Mainline' is my take on the Ry Cooder style that uses slide playing with an equal mix of fingerstyle. Using D tuning it conjures up the kind of sounds you can hear on tunes like **Jesus On The Mainline', 'Tamp Em Up Solid', '13 Question Method'** and many more. The opening bars are played slowly with fairly Ad Lib rhythm as an introduction to the main theme. I'm using a mix of alternating thumb and fingers while picking out the melody with the slide. It's a good basis to work on but try and loosen up, and be less rigid with the alternating pick. The tune contains one of Cooders signature riffs (**bars 11 - 13**) and is great one to learn if you want to really sound like the man. Ry borrows heavily from vintage slide man **Tampa Red** for this mix of slide and fingerstyle, so take time out to listen to these early innovators of slide guitar.

As a last note try changing the D tuning to a **Slack-Key** variety, either a half or a whole tone lower, for an even more authentic Cooder sound

COODER ROCKS !

AUDIO PTAB VIDEO

MENU

D Tuning

♩ = 120





In the mid eighties and early nineties Ry Cooder toured his sound revealing a heavier rock style of slide playing. For the first time he began using a customised **Strat with an Oahu Lap Steel** pick up fitted in the bridge position, and a **Teisco** pick up in the neck position. Listen to the **'Get Rhythm'** album and you'll hear this great rock sound with rootsy slide. The combination of these quirky pick ups gave the slide massive sustain and a slightly grungy overdrive. 'Cooder Rocks' attempts to capture the essence of this sound and style, using D tuning for ease of slide melody, and added bass note accompaniment. The jerky syncopated rhythm features on many of his tracks and although I'm using an electric guitar here, it works just as well on acoustic.

The first part of the tune could easily form the backing to a Cooder song whereas the second part demonstrates a solo idea. Try improvising your own slide ideas on that melody friendly top D string - Rock on!!

FEELING BAD

D Tuning





One of my favourite Ry Cooder slide tracks is an instrumental blues he uses for the movie, **'Crossroads'**. **'Feeling Bad Blues'** is a slow mournful piece conjuring up all the slide greats of the Delta. Using D tuning 'Feeling Bad' is my take on the tune, staying as close to the original style and sound as possible. Working equally well on both electric or acoustic, i'm using the Music Master with a tremelo effect for real Cooder flavour. Added bass notes are used as a drone below the melody.

GABBY'S TUNE

D Wahine tuning

D A D F# B D



Gabby Pahinui is best known for his mastery of the slack-key guitar, and was Hawaii's main exponent of this lush sounding style. Ry Cooder a great admirer of this sound, often sat in with the Gabby Pahinui Band and went on to use slack-key in his own roots slide. He paid tribute to Gabby Pahinui on his 1976 album **'Chiken Skin Music'**, using slack-key on the track **'Chloe'.**

In Gabby's Tune, I've tried to capture the essence of this sound using **D6 tuning D A D F# B D** - also known as **'Wahine'**. It sounds even better if you tune down half a tone, but for the sake of ease I've used regular D tuning and left the B string as normal. Each full fret chord produces the Hawaiin sounding 6th chord and the tune is easy to play as there are very few single note slides to worry about. All the effect is acheived using block chords - great sounds !

I'm using the Music Master once more, with the added advantage of the Supro lap steel pick up, but as usual you can choose acoustic.

Ok, so there we have it. I hope you've enjoyed playing through the course as much as I have enjoyed putting it together for you. It's made me realise once more that Ry Cooder is certainly one of the best guitarists and slide players ever !

As with any guitar style there is always more to learn. Slide guitar is probably one of the most difficult to master as essentially it's more about feel and instinct than notes on tab. My last bit of advice is use the music as a guide only then use your ears to really show you the way around the fretboard. Listen to the man himself and absorb the style.

Check out the web links below for more insight into Ry Cooder.

Many thanks and happy sliding !

Rick Payne